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ABSTRACT

In certain colleges, mid-semester Deficiency Reports were issued on the assumption that marginal students (those with a D or F after nine weeks of class) should be alerted to the danger of failure. In spring 1969, a study was made to see if those who received the reports made better final grades than those who did not. Of those judged in danger at mid-term, one-half (the control group) were selected at random to receive the reports; the other half (the experimental group) were sent no notice. At the end of term, a random sample was taken from each group and final grades compared. Those with a W, WF, or WP were excluded. The two groups were further divided into those receiving a D or F and an average final grade was computed for each. An F Test was applied to the distribution of the final grades of both groups to see if significant differences existed in the variances of the two groups. None were found for those with a F at mid-term. For those with a D, however, the average final grade for the experimental group was significantly higher than for the control group. In summary, it was shown that, for those with a mid-term F grade, the report made no difference, but, for those with a mid-term D, it made a great difference. It may be concluded that the notice discouraged the marginal student from doing his best and deprived him of motivation to achieve a higher grade. After this study, the use of Deficiency Reports was discontinued. Other colleges may wish to re-examine their own similar grading practices. (HH)

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An Evaluation of Mid-Semester Deficiency Grading Practices

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It is common practice in many Texas colleges and universities to send mid-semester grade reports to students who are earning a D or F after the first nine weeks of classes. This practice has recently been discontinued at El Centro College. The decision to discontinue this practice was based partly on a study completed during the spring semester, 1969.[1] The study appears to have significance for other colleges and universities following a similar practice of issuing Deficiency Reports at mid-semester.

The practice of issuing mid-semester Deficiency Reports is based, at least in part, on the assumption that those students performing marginally need to be alerted to the imminent danger of failure. The results of this study suggest that this assumption needs to be evaluated.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study was to determine if students who are mailed Deficiency Reports at mid-semester receive better final grades than those who are deficient at mid-semester but are not mailed Deficiency Reports.

PROCEDURE

The procedure followed to determine the relationship of Deficiency Reports to final grades was to establish a control group and an experimental group of students from those who had been judged deficient at mid-semester by their instructors (deficient being defined as an accumulated D or F average in a specific course). One-half of this group was selected at random to receive Deficiency Reports (control group) and the other half was sent no notification (experimental group). At the end of the semester a random sample from the control and experimental groups was selected in order to compare the final grades received in the specific courses with the deficient grades earned at mid-semester. (Students with a final grade of W, WF, and WP were excluded from the study.)

The two study groups were further stratified into those students receiving a grade of D at mid-semester and those students receiving a grade of F at mid-semester. Two statistical measures were employed in the study. One, an average final grade was computed for each group. Two, an F Test was applied to the distribution of final grades compiled by the control and experimental groups to determine if any significant differences in the variances of two populations were present.

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RESULTS

The results of the study can be seen in Table I.

(Table I should be inserted about here)

There were no significant differences in the final grades obtained by the control and experimental students who had earned an F grade at mid-semester. Significant differences were found between the control and experimental groups for students who had earned a grade of D at mid-semester. An F value of 7.65 is significant at the .01 level. The average final grade for the experimental group was significantly higher than the average final grade of the control group.

SUMMARY

It would appear to make no difference whether a student receives a mid-semester Deficiency Report or not if he is earning a grade of F at mid-semester. On the other hand, it would appear to make significant differences to those students earning a D at mid-semester. The educational significance of this finding seems to be found in the fact that the notice apparently discourages marginal students from doing their best. This finding would tend to support the premise that students performing at a minimum or marginal level are not helped by discouraging notices of their progress. Marginal students appear to lose some motivation to achieve when issued notices of imminent danger of failure.

The findings of this study appear to negate what has been suggested earlier as the primary purpose for following a procedure of issuing mid-semester Deficiency Reports.

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[1] Miller, Eldon Research Study 69-1: Comparison of Receiving Deficiency Reports in Relation to Final Grades. El Centro College, 1969.

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TABLE I

COMPARISON OF FINAL GRADES
FOR STUDENTS WHO DID OR DID NOT
RECEIVE DEFICIENCY REPORTS

Student Group	Average Final Grade	Number in sample	F test (test for significant differences
1.0 Students receiving D's at mid-term		171	
1.1 Control Group Students did receive deficiency reports	1.21	88	7.65**
1.2 Experimental group Students did not receive deficiency reports	1.38	83	
2.0 Students receiving F's at mid-term		145	
2.1 Control Group Students did receive deficiency reports	0.64	70	1.84 N.S.
2.2 Experimental Group Students did not receive deficiency reports	0.45	75	

** = significant at the .01 level of probability.

N.S. = not significant.

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